

HACK YOUR favourite websites



Apply alternative front ends to the sites you visit every day to customise their appearance, add useful features and protect your privacy. **Robert Irvine** rounds up the best options



Wave a wand at Wikipedia

Wikipedia is an incredible free resource, but while its articles are interesting to read, the site's dated, monochrome, text-heavy layout can feel dull to browse. To make the encyclopedia more engaging, install the magical add-on Wikiwand (www.wikiwand.com) in Chrome or Firefox, or search for an article via its website in your desktop or mobile browser.

This alternative front end transforms Wikipedia's appearance with an attractive, modern look and fonts, and expands images to create large cover photos. It also converts each article's Contents list into a convenient side menu, and provides page previews when you hover your mouse over links and pop-up definitions when you Ctrl+click individual words. The main content is automatically made much easier to read, with further customisation options available, and you can switch back to standard Wikipedia at the click of a button.

A Wikiwand app is coming to Android soon. You can sign up for an invite at invites.wikiwand.com.



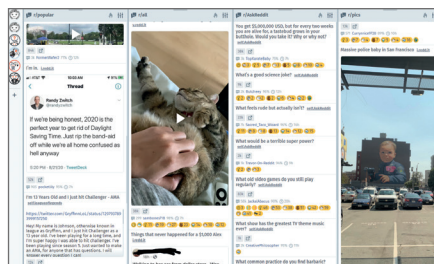
Wikiwand makes Wikipedia articles easier to read and more visually engaging



Revolutionise your Reddit experience

Reddit redesigned its website in 2018 to such outcry from its users that it still offers the option to switch back to 'Old Reddit'. Fortunately, there are better ways to access the social network, via front ends created by third-party developers.

Deck for Reddit (rdddeck.com), for example, lets you browse multiple subreddits at once in resizable columns, similar to the Twitter app TweetDeck (see opposite). You can add as many subreddits as you like, and sign into your Reddit account for additional features such as dark mode and hiding NSFW (not safe for work) content.



Browse multiple subreddits side-by-side using the alternative front end Deck

Lots more options are available through the brilliant browser add-on Reddit Enhancement Suite (redditenhancementsuite.com), including auto-scroll, keyboard shortcuts for upvoting and downvoting posts, an inline image viewer, clearer presentation of comments and an automatic night mode.

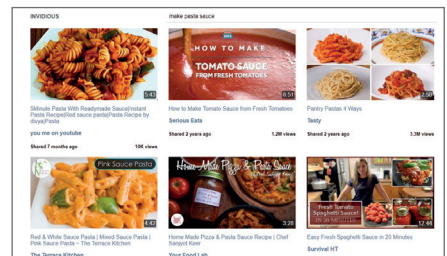
On Android and iOS devices, install Infinity (bit.ly/infinityreddit510) and Apollo (apolloapp.io), respectively, for a smoother and more elegant Reddit experience than its official app.



Watch YouTube without ads or tracking

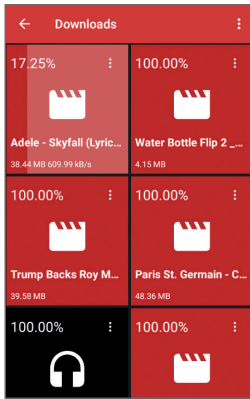
Viewing videos on YouTube usually means being watched yourself, as Google tracks your interests and targets you with adverts. Until recently, you could protect your privacy while enjoying all the benefits of YouTube using an ad- and tracker-free front end called Invidious (invidio.us), but the developer shut the site down on 1 September – not because of threats from Google, but because he was “tired and ready to move on”.

Happily, Invidious lives on through other ‘instances’ that use the same code (instances.invidio.us) to offer a clean, Google-free YouTube experience, complete with a large video player, one-click dark mode and the ability to download audio and video content. On the downside, you can't sort your search results by ‘most recent’ and only 20 videos are displayed per page.



Use an Invidious ‘instance’ to watch YouTube videos without Google knowing

Alternatively, you can download FreeTube (bit.ly/freetube510), an open-source YouTube player for Windows, macOS and Linux that lets you watch, search and download videos on your desktop, without ads or tracking. It also offers Chrome and



NewPipe lets you download videos from YouTube on your Android device

Firefox extensions that open YouTube videos directly in FreeTube.

The best ad-free YouTube front-end for Android is NewPipe, which – unsurprisingly –

isn't available in the Google Play store, but is free to download from alternative app store F-Droid (bit.ly/newpipe510). It's lightweight, privacy-focused and lets you download videos and play them in the background, but you'll need to allow your device to install 'unknown apps'.



Make Twitter look and work better

Twitter's website is basic in its features and design, and even last year's revamp did little more than move things around and add a dark mode. To keep 'power users' happy, Twitter provides its own alternative front end called TweetDeck (tweetdeck.twitter.com), for desktop and mobile devices. This lets you monitor your timeline, notifications, messages, trending topics and other activity side by side, manage multiple accounts and schedule tweets for later.

Twitter has clamped down on free third-party apps accessing its service, which is why tools such as HootSuite are now paid-for and business-orientated. Nitter (nitter.net), however, offers a streamlined way to browse tweets while maintaining your privacy. This site removes the JavaScript that Twitter uses to track you, as well as all ads, and makes the site much faster to load. You can't log into your Twitter account through Nitter – instead, you search for a username to view that feed anonymously. Install the browser add-on Nitter Redirect (bit.ly/nitter510)

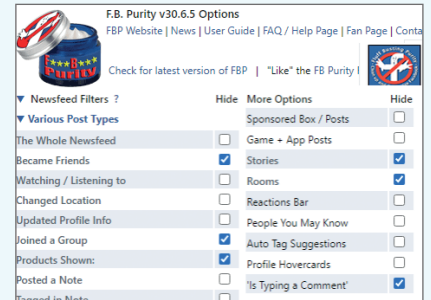


Nitter lets you browse tweets without Twitter tracking you or displaying ads

IMPROVE FACEBOOK'S NEW DESIGN

As we reported last issue, Facebook has disabled the option to revert to its 'classic' design. If you're not keen on the new layout, you can use FB Purity (www.fbpurity.com) to tweak it to your liking. Available for all the main browsers, this extension lets you remove unwanted elements such as posts about events, recommendation requests and sponsored content; hide photos, videos and chat features; reorder your news feed to display recent or close friends' posts first; customise the font size and background colour; and much more. FB Purity's developer warns that

some options may not work with the new Facebook design yet. Alternatively, you can install the new Chrome extension 'Old Layout for Facebook' (bit.ly/3hTyh00) to revert to the classic design - see page 32.



to open all Twitter links in Nitter.

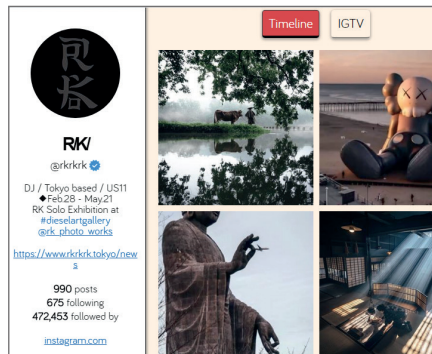
For a better Twitter experience on your phone or tablet, we recommend Albatross for Android and iOS (bit.ly/albatross510), which is fully customisable, removes ads from Twitter and displays tweets in a genuinely chronological order.



Access Instagram in your browser

Although it's possible to view Instagram feeds in your browser rather than the mobile app – just type instagram.com/ followed by the username – you can only scroll so far before being nagged to log in, and you can't view photos full size, or download them. Bibliogram (bibliogram.art) solves these problems by providing a simple, speedy front end for Instagram that removes ads and trackers. Just search for a username to access that person's timeline, with no obstructions, and see details of their posts and follower count. Click an image to open it and right-click to save it to your hard drive.

Note that Bibliogram doesn't let you post, comment or follow anonymously, or view private Instagram profiles.



Bibliogram lets you browse Instagram feeds without being nagged to sign in

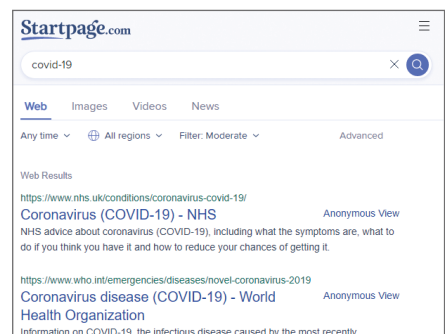
Search Google without being spied on

If you like the speed, accuracy and convenience of Google search, but don't like being spied on and having information about you collected, consider switching to Startpage.com (www.startpage.com). This privacy-focused search engine uses Google search results, but with none of the intrusive data tracking and logging, so you can quickly find online content without online trackers finding you.

Unlike Google, Startpage.com doesn't store your searches, record your IP address, implant tracking cookies or share your personal information with third parties. It also offers a useful Anonymous View, which lets you open Google results using a proxy server.

To support its upkeep (Startpage.com pays Google to use its results), the site displays sponsored links at the top of your search results, but these are clearly labelled 'Ad' and have no access to your personal information.

There are also Startpage apps for Android (bit.ly/startdroid510) and iOS (bit.ly/startios510), and add-ons for all the main browsers. ■



Startpage.com serves as a privacy-focused front end for Google searches